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New School Assignment: Re-envisioning *Sold* as a Litany

Part One: Demonstration of Understanding

Litany:

1

**:** a prayer consisting of a series of invocations and supplications by the leader with alternate responses by the congregation

2

*a* **:** a resonant or repetitive chant

*b* **:** a usually lengthy recitation or enumeration <a familiar *litany* of complaints>

*c* **:** a sizable series or set <a *litany* of problems>

**You can find the *Sold* litany in images** [**Here**](http://soldlitany.weebly.com)**.**

Part Two: Written Meta-Analysis

As Jennifer Buehler of NCTE said in her interview with Patricia McCormick of *Sold* fame, “Facts enhance Fiction.” Research and promoting strong research while examining a real story enhances the understanding of the story and creates a more complex connectedness—no matter what age or skill level as a reader. I cannot tell you the last time that I came across a book that was categorized as historical fiction or events based on a real issue that I am not an expert in (and I am not ever truly an expert on anything, even after reading, re-reading, examining, google-ing, and discussing a topic) and I did not even do a quick search to see *more*. I am not ashamed of the Wikipedia quick search. I am not ashamed of my fascination with how I could start with a quick Google search of a topic and I continue to click🡪click🡪click🡪until I have reached a destination so completely far away from where I started. The loose connections that we come across, however, can sometimes enhance our understanding of the original intended topic. Careful use and examination of language extends our understanding. When we read *Sold* as a class this semester, I was fascinated by the idea of this transaction that occurs between man and his perceived property. The title word, *sold*, led me down that same rabbit hole of searching and unearthing new connotations of the word.

I am further prompted to write to Patricia McCormick to discuss the word *sold* and its impact on the work itself. The way that Americans view the sale of an item might be quite different culturally to the way other countries view sales or product transactions. Or perhaps it is universal. I am particularly interested in the moral ambiguity that occurs with selling or participating in a sale transaction. My father, a small businessman, would never “go back on a sale,” as many others would cite. “Good business,” he always says, “is in sticking with your existing customers because they will come back again and again.” He also protects his sales with contracts. The sale transaction is built upon trust. He also participates in bidding wars for new property or product either by auction or through third party sales. What moral code do a transaction’s participants need to abide by? Do they need to abide by any moral code, or is it all about getting the best deal?

I began to see selling, buying, property, and belonging as a bizarre practice, especially within the context of McCormick’s human trafficking background. The men in the text feel a sense of ownership immediately. They feel a sense of urgency in their transaction and intend to get the most value for their money. I wanted to explore the selling process through a litany of images. I chose to begin with popular signs that tell of “sale” or “big sale.” The colors are bright or red in nature and present that same sense of urgency that I felt the male predators in *Sold* also possessed. The signs are flashy and promise satisfaction, the same way that Lakshmi is presented with a glamorous opportunity that makes her feel adult almost immediately. The images that follow the initial money and sale signs start to progressively get more aggressive in nature, first by using pricetags and barcodes that typically are attached to items of interest. The images start innocent (a pricetag delicately attached to the wrist of a cartoon faceless female) and then by slowly dehumanizing the females further (the barcodes tattooed on real life females as if they are objects of desire to be sold).

I wanted to include seemingly innocuous products or memes that I found while searching for “sold,” “selling,” “woman for sale,” etc. because I found them to be particularly resonant of the sentiment that I hear quite often from students when they research human trafficking: “Yeah, but that is in XYZ country. We don’t treat women like that here.” I can’t tell you how many times I have heard this in the classroom. When advertisers and consumers objectify women literally, such as the image of the woman who possesses no head in the advertisement for a purse), it tells others that she is literally an object that can not only be purchased for use, but she can be owned. There is power in these real advertisements, like the beer woman in the hand of the man. It is clear that these are women’s bodies in the images because of feminine features, but they are barely recognizable because they often only possess the lower half of their bodies. I find it fascinating that the majority of these images of women whose likeness, let alone body, are for purchase and consumption have no visible face. What is it about a woman’s face in advertisements being used in a sexual sale that would turn consumer’s off? Could it be that faces emote? Could it be that the consumer might find the visible reaction of the consumed to be one of disgust?

The final images in my litany are of the Task Force of Human Trafficking and their concept store, Woman to Go. The installation in Tel Aviv was held and instantly attracted attention by the media for its avant garde and unique perspective on the issue. The women are clearly being used as objects and observed by “window shoppers.” The reactions of the average people viewing the installation are particularly interesting to me, as they look completely casual. No one looks shocked or even intrigued, especially the women who are casually observing.

I found these images to be fascinating as I did my own search for “sale” and “woman for sale.” This is an in-your-face installation and draws attention to the *sale* aspect of human trafficking. I chose to end with these images because they felt particularly disturbing when placed in the context of shopping. The connotations of these words take on new life, and I felt the linguistic ramifications of the title, *Sold*, present a worthwhile topic for discussion. What is property? What is to be consumed or used? What is mine? How should I protect what is mine? What is the cost of something?